



Projekt Erasmus+ „Effective strategies in students' reading education”

No 2019-1-PL01-KA201-065421

Alytus conference description

"Read to see the world"

June 22, 2022

Alytus

On June 22, 2022, a summary of the Erasmus+ project "Effective Strategies in Students' Reading Education " No. 2019-1-PL01-KA201-065421 was held. The event was organized by the Alytus Dainava Middle School. It was held at the Audiovisual Arts Center (former Jewish synagogue). All educational institutions, libraries and employees of the Education and Sports Department of the Alytus Municipality were invited to the conference. The conference was also attended by Jurgita Šukevičienė, Deputy Mayor of Alytus Municipality. The event was attended by 103 participants from various educational and cultural institutions of the city and district of Alytus.

Four speakers were invited to deliver papers at the conference - well-known, competent specialists in the field of children's literature and the creation and promotion of reading promotion programs and methodology: Kazimierz Ambroziak - project coordinator from the Center for Education Development of Giżycko County (Poland), Inga Mituneviciute - president of the Lithuanian branch of the International Association of Children's and Young People's Literature (IBBY), Joana Grygutis - psychologist, canitherapist, Justinas Vancevičius - head of the reading promotion program "Children's Land" created by the Public Institution "School Improvement Center".

The conference "Reading - to see the world" was opened by the director of Alytus Dainava Pro-Gymnasium Edita Matulevičienė. She shared her childhood experiences of learning to read.

The biggest influence on her desire to learn to read was the close family members around her, who read newspapers and books in the early mornings and evenings - her parents, grandparents, aunts, brother and sister. They not only read, but also quoted passages, shared news, told book stories, so that if she wanted to say something important, she felt she had to learn to read, that there was a whole secret world in books.

The headmistress of the school noted that statistics are merciless, and according to them, there are few families today where you can see such a picture of the family, and raised the question of what we can do to help children and young people discover the joy and value of reading. We sought answers at the conference.

The deputy mayor of Alytus, Jurgita Šukevičienė, congratulated the creators and implementers of the project. She stressed the importance of reading in the formation of an educated, critically thinking and creative personality. She also confirmed that the joint recommendations prepared by all three Alytus schools involved in the project (Dainava Pro-Gymnasium, Dzukija School and the Vocational Training Center) to the city government on promoting reading in the city have already been discussed at the Council meeting, and some steps have been taken. One of them is to allocate additional funds for the renewal of the school libraries' book collections. A team has also been set up at the Alytus City Council's Education and Sports Department, which will be responsible for implementing the above recommendations.

Kazimierz Ambroziak, project coordinator at the Gizycko County Education Development Center, presented the project. His presentation provided an overview of the entire project period from September 2019 to June 2022. Project training was presented. The project was not without challenges due to the long period of the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the strict quarantine across Europe, the schedule of teachers' trips had to be adjusted accordingly.

The first training, which was to be held in Lithuania, was postponed. The Polish partners, as the initiators of the project, took the responsibility and duty of organizing the virtual training. All other teacher trainings were held live according to the planned schedule. The presentation introduced the activities, the project partners, and most importantly provided a link to the project's website, where the Open Educational Resources (OER) developed by the participating teachers are available.

All OER were translated into the national languages of the participating countries (Polish, Latvian, Lithuanian) and into English. Mr. Kazimieras' presentation was translated into Lithuanian by Jolanta Miliauskė, project manager of the Alytus Vocational Training Center.

Joana Grygutis, a psychologist and canitherapist, came to the conference with her dog Kia, a Labrador retriever. Her presentation consisted of two parts: theoretical and practical. In the theoretical part, she introduced the concept of canitherapy, talked about the children with difficulties she works with, shared her own and other canitherapists' methodological materials and recommendations. The psychologist pointed out that children with reading difficulties tend to be less motivated to learn. This leads not only to school exclusion from peers, but also to certain psychological personality traits, such as, in this case, low self-esteem.

The most important question of the presentation was: how can a dog help in the reading process?

Theoretical information was thus supplemented by practical sessions with Kia, the therapy dog. Psychologist Joana, together with her pet, showed a simulation of the entire meeting with the child: the first acquaintance, the rituals of greeting and saying goodbye at each meeting, the process of reading to the dog, and the use of different methodologies.

The dog's participation in the reading process emotionally relaxes the reader, as the animal does not judge or condemn. The canine psychologist selects a book that meets the individual needs of the child. In this way, a specially trained dog and a professional dog therapist, in small steps, help the child develop a friendship with a book. This friendship brings other positive changes in the child's life: reduced anxiety before or during reading, increased motivation and positive changes in learning, increased self-confidence.

The conference was also attended by Justinas Vancevičius, head of the reading promotion program "Children's Land", founded by the Public Institution "School Improvement Center". He presented the program for promoting reading among children, which has been in existence for six years.

The goal of the program is to promote children's culture, emphasize its importance for personal and social development, and develop new methods and tools for children to experience the joy of reading, learn about literary authors, and develop creativity, cognitive, cultural and other competencies. The head of "Children's Land" shared good practices in organizing literary education and literary festivals for children. Most of the work and products of the Children's Land team have been transformed into educational and cultural events (plays, concerts, exhibitions, literary escape rooms, etc.) and are open not only to children, but also to anyone who works with children or is interested in children's literature. Justinas Vancevičius invites everyone to visit the following websites:

www.butybes.lt, www.knygiukai.lt, www.tinybooks.eu, www.vaikuknygusala.lt,
www.nuotykiatesiasi.lt

as well as to take advantage of the "Magical Stories of Book Creators" and "What Writers Talk About" video series, the virtual week of children's and youth literature, and the Children's Book Island festival at the LRT media center. In the words of the head of the Children's Land program himself: "For us, the most important thing is children experiencing the joy of reading! We are convinced that reading is not an old-fashioned activity or duty, but the beginning of a real adventure!" Participants also had a mini workshop - they made booklets.

Another speaker who shared her experience and insights at the conference was Inga Mituneviciute, president of the Lithuanian branch of the International Association for Children's and Young People's Literature (IBBY). She is currently in the US, so she sent a pre-prepared video of her presentation "The Reader's Path: twists, turns, rollercoasters, potholes" to the conference. The lecture looked at the impact of reading on children of different ages: from preschooler to young adult. Adults are identified both as readers and as facilitators, helping children discover the joy of reading. I. Mitunevičiūtė shared tips on how to get out of the reading "pits." For those who often complain that they don't have time to read, she quoted Daniel Pennac: "Reading time is always stolen time. (Just like time for writing or love, by the way)."

All conference participants and speakers were greeted by the character Anė of Žaliastėliai (Anne of Green Gables), translated from book to reality by Rūta Jonė Lynykaitė, a student at Alytus Dainava Progymnasium.

The talks at the "Read - to see the world" conference were moderated by Eglė Lynykienė, project manager of Alytus Dainava Progymnasium.

The biggest task of all projects promoting reading is to create a reading society of the future. Therefore, we encourage everyone to join efforts - parents, teachers, reading promotion specialists, librarians and book authors.

Photo gallery illustrating the conference.



Photo 1. The beginning of the conference. The conference is opened by director Edita Matulevičienė.



Photo 2. Part of the assembled audience.



Photo 3. Another part of the gathered audience.



Photo 4. Kazimierz Ambroziak at work. Next to him stands Jolanta Miliauskė



Photo 5. Guest of honor Mrs. Jurgita Šukevičienė, deputy mayor of the city of Alytus, accompanied by director Edita



Photo 5. Backstage conversations during the break. In the middle Bożena Giedyszewicz -director of the institution coordinating the project.



Photo 6. Eglė Lynykienė sadly ends the conference